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ABSTRACT

The Jicarilla Apache people celebrate a young girl's coming of age by having a feast called "Keesda". Derived from the Spanish word "fiesta", "Keesda" is a Jicarilla Apache word meaning "feast". This feast is held for four days, usually during the summer months. However, it may be held at any time during the year whenever a young girl comes of age. When this happens, a quiet ceremony is held and the celebration and feast are held the following summer. The ceremony for the feast follows strict Jicarilla customs since the people believe that the girl's future happiness and well-being depend on following the details exactly. Keesda is a busy but happy occasion for the family who is celebrating it. Relatives and friends join in the celebration, festivities, and preparations for the feast. A young brave is chosen by the girl's father to dance with his daughter in the teepee. The girl's family, with the help of the brave's family, prepare all the necessary details of the feast. This illustrated booklet describes the activities held during the 4-day feast and gives a young brave's account of his role during the ceremony.
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KÉESDA

Coming-out Feast



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K É E S D A
A COMING-OUT FEAST

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THE JICARILLA APACHE PEOPLE celebrate a young girl's coming of age by having a feast called....



KÉESDA. Kéesda is a Jicarilla Apache word meaning "feast" and it is derived from the Spanish word "fiesta."

Kéesda is held for four days. Usually it takes place during the summer months. However, it may be held at any time during the year whenever a young girl comes of age. When this happens, a quiet ceremony is held and the celebration and feast are held the following summer.



The ceremony for the feast follows strict Jicarilla Apache customs. The Jicarilla people believe that the girl's future happiness and well-being depend on following the details exactly.

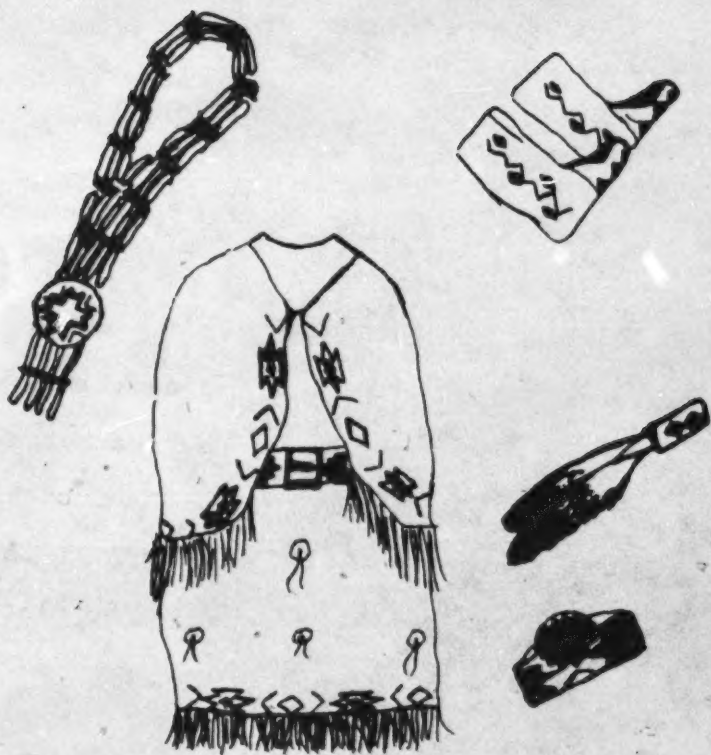
Kéesda is a busy but happy occasion for the family who is celebrating it. Relatives and friends join in the celebration and festivities. They also help cook the food which will be served during the feast.



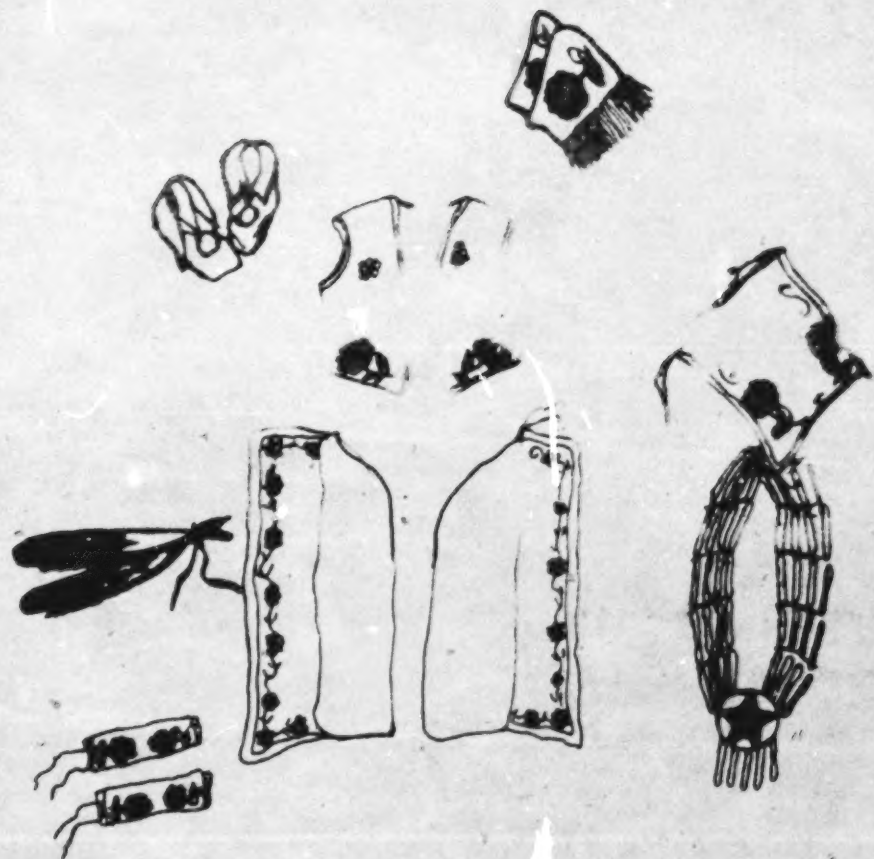
Preparations for the feast are done long before it starts. It is the duty of the father of the girl to invite the medicine man who will perform the ceremony. He will also choose a young brave who will dance with his daughter in the teepee.



The girl's family, with the help of the brave's family, prepare all the necessary details of the feast. The ceremonial clothes are provided by both families. For the girl, these include beaded belt and necklace, turquoise jewelry, deerskin cape, feathers, moccasins, and buckskin dress. The buckskin dress is very elaborately made and it is prepared months before the feast takes place.



The brave's outfit includes leggings, vest, arm bands, breech cloth, cuffs, necklace, moccasins, and feathers.



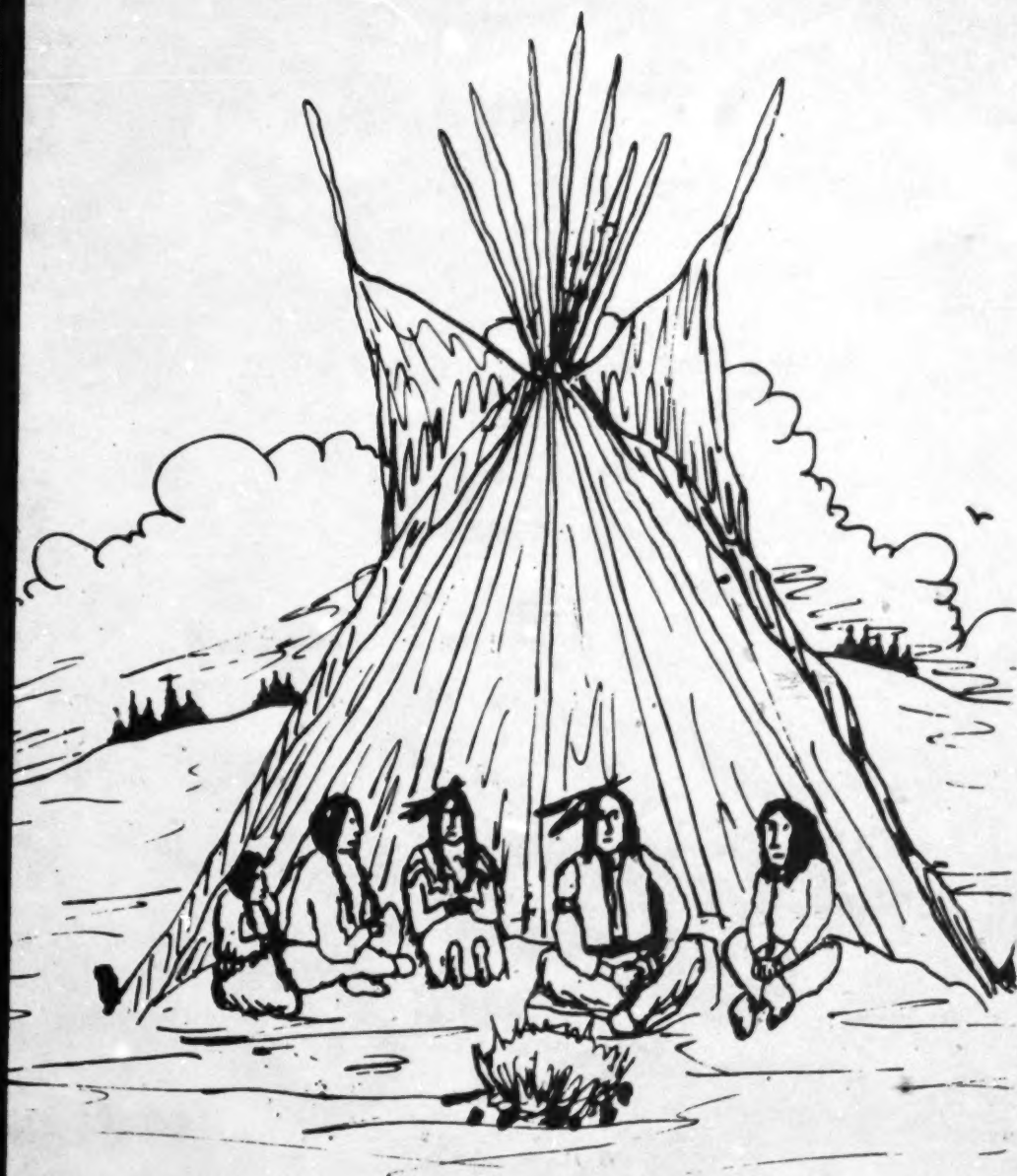
A few days before the feast, the camp, where the ceremony will take place, is made ready. Tents are set up and shades are built. Food and water are brought in and firewood is gathered. Then the men and women get busy preparing and cooking the food for the people who will come to the feast.



The families of both the girl and boy and the medicine man wake up early on the first morning of the feast. The ceremonial teepee is put up with the door facing east. Fresh branches of pine are laid inside the teepee. Then the medicine man, the girl and boy, their families and relatives go inside the teepee where the ceremony will be held.



All the people sit around the teepee on the pine branches. The medicine man starts to sing as he builds a fire in the center of the teepee.



The medicine man continues to sing. As he is singing, the mother of the girl dresses her with the ceremonial outfit. The boy's mother does the same for him. They start with the moccasins and work upward, putting each piece on until the girl and boy have on them all the complete ceremonial dress. After both are dressed, the medicine man paints their faces.

The girl and boy do not remove their outfit during the four days of the feast.



The medicine man gives the girl and boy some rules to follow during the feast. These rules are followed closely so that they will have a good life in the future.



After the ceremony in the teepee, the people go outside and all sit in a line in front of the teepee. The medicine man marks four places for the boy and girl to run. The boy runs first and the girl follows him. They run to the first place marked and return to the front of the teepee. An old woman utters a sound into the girl's ear. Then they run to the other marked places, each time returning to the front of the teepee. Each time the old woman utters a sound into the girl's ear.



Then the girl goes back inside the tee-pee to get corn grains. She goes out again to give each of the people sitting outside a few corn grains. The corn, if planted with other corn grains, will bring a good harvest for it will keep the plants from freezing.



The medicine man and the brave stay outside. The medicine man tells him what to do during this time. The brave runs to the east, to the south, to the west, and then to the north, each time returning to the front of the teepee.

The ceremony for the first morning is over. The girl and boy take part in the usual activities of the feast.



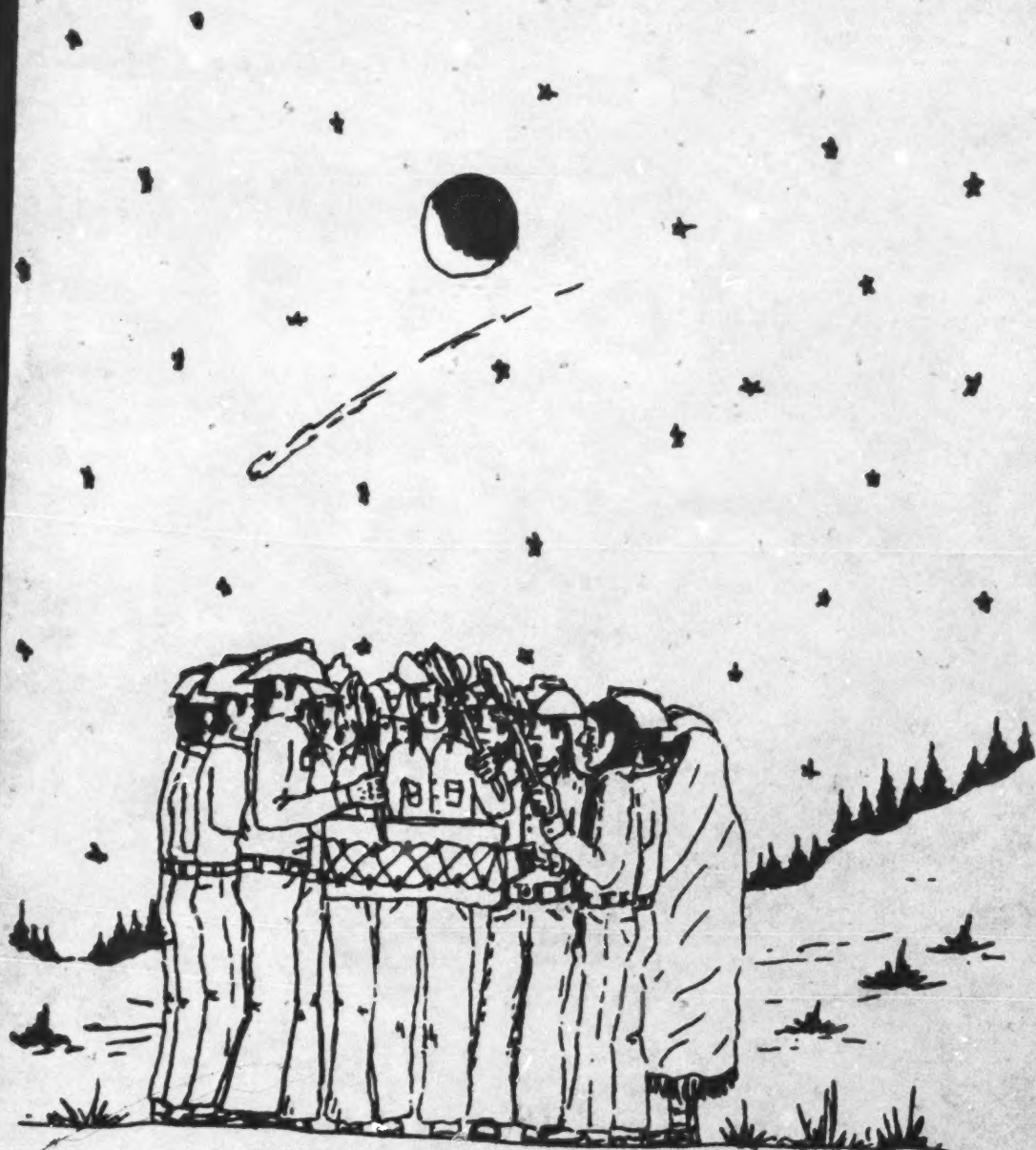
In the first evening of the ceremony, the medicine man sings the long life songs and dancing songs. This takes place inside the teepee. During the long life songs, all the people sit and listen. When the dancing songs are sung, all rise and dance in place. The girl shuffles in place and the boy steps a high one. Later in the evening, food is brought inside and everybody eats. Then the first evening is over.

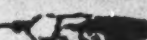


On the second and third day, the faces of the boy and girl are painted again. The usual activities for the first day are followed. On these days, more people come and eat. There is plenty of fry bread and beef or mutton stew. Tiswin, a corn beverage, is prepared and served. Hot coffee, punch, tea, and fresh or dry fruit are also served.



The second and third evenings follow the same activities. The singing and dancing get longer and longer. As the dancing goes on inside the teepee, a round dance takes place outside. Anyone may join the round dance.



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On the fourth day, the faces of the boy and girl are painted again. More and more people come to the feast. They come in the morning and all through the day and evening. The women are kept busy cooking fry bread and stew. The men are also busy cutting and preparing the meat. The children are kept busy too. They help in every way they can.



On the fourth evening, the singing and dancing start again. These last until morning. The people who are dancing the round dance keep dancing until sunrise.



The feasting and social activities are over early the fifth morning. It is time for the boy and girl to take off their ceremonial clothes. As the medicine man sings, their clothes are removed, this time starting from the feathers on the head all the way down to the moccasins. Then their hair is washed and their faces are painted by the medicine man. After all this, the Keesda is over. The girl is now considered grown-up.



A YOUNG BRAVE

By Arnold Vicenti

Every summer on our reservation, young Jicarilla Apache girls who become of age have a coming-out feast. A coming-out feast is a four-day ceremony. The Jicarilla people join in the celebration. They eat and dance and have fun.

One early summer morning, the grandmother of one of these girls came to our house. She asked my mother if I could be a brave for her granddaughter who was going to have a feast. My mother said, "Okay, I'll let Arnold be the brave."

So I took my suitcase, my blankets, my saddle, and bridle. Then my grandmother and I went to the camp where the coming-out feast was going to be held.

There were many people at the camp when we arrived. I was very scared. After the tipi was put up all the people went inside. The medicine man began to sing and my grandmother started to put on my buckskin clothes, starting from the moccasins and going up to the feather on my head. The girl's mother did the same for her. Then our faces were painted. My face was painted white and the girl's face was painted yellow. At this time the medicine man gave us some rules to follow during the feast, so I listened closely.

After the ceremony in the tipi, we went outside and all the people followed. They sat down in a line in front of the tipi. The medicine man made four marks with corn pollen toward the east. Then the girl and I ran around those marks and returned to the front of the tipi. I ran first and the girl followed me. Everytime, the girl returned to the front of the tipi where her grandmother uttered a cry into her ear.

The girl then went inside the tipi and came out with corn grains. She gave corn to all the people sitting outside. The corn was given to them so they could plant it with their crops and would have a good harvest.

As the girl was passing out the corn, the medicine man told me to run to the east

and gather any kind of grass and horse manure. So I ran to the east and did what he told me. Then he told me to run to the south, to the west, and to the north, each time returning to the front of the tipi. After all this, the ceremony was over for the morning.

About noon, more people arrived and were served food and tiswin. They came all day and also at night.

When night came, we went into the tipi. The medicine man began to sing. He sang long life songs and dancing songs. When he sang the dancing songs we all danced, including the people who were in the tipi.

The second night, we danced longer. The third night, we danced longer and longer. On the fourth and last night, the medicine man

sang so many songs we had to dance all night. It was very hard for me to stay awake. There was a lot of smoke in the tipi and it burned my eyes. Then the heat from the fire became hotter and hotter.

Outside I heard the round dance and all the people having fun. I had to dance in the tipi so I could not join the round dance.

Early on the fifth morning, we took off our ceremonial outfit. Then our hair was washed with yucca. After this we went inside the tipi once more and the medicine man painted our faces. He told us not to wash off the paint. This was the last part of the ceremony. Then the people began to leave for the coming-out feast was over.

